



Astronomy Research Grant Application Guidelines – 2021

Introduction

The purpose of these notes is to provide guidance and instructions to Applicants when preparing a grant proposal for consideration by the Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP). They are intended to supplement the [Research Grants Handbook](#) and Je-S system by providing specific guidance on:

1. Aims of the scheme
2. The Astronomy Grants Panel remit
3. Timetable
4. General information
5. Application Process
 - Je-S Submission
 - Structure of Proposals & Page Limits
 - Required Information & Attachments
 - Requesting resources
7. Peer review process
8. New Applicants Scheme
9. Useful links

1 - Aims of the scheme

The specific aims of the scheme are to:

- Ensure that the programme supported is scientifically excellent and is clearly in line with stated Council strategic science objectives;
- Consider the strategic objectives of the UK Space Agency, address the impact agenda and be responsive to changes and new ideas;
- Ensure that the process is transparent and accountable, particularly with respect to the means of prioritisation;
- Ensure that the outcome, where appropriate, takes account of the Council's and the UK Space Agency's current and planned investment in facilities;
- Ensure that there is an appropriate balance between observations, instrumentation and theory and between the various sub-disciplines of astronomy and the development of novel, generic technologies for astronomy and space science, consistent with the overall strategy of Council and the UK Space Agency.

2 - The Astronomy Grants Panel Remit

The Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP) will assess and provide recommendations to the Council Executive and the Science Programme Advisory Committee (SPAC) of the UK Space Agency (UKSA), under the dual key arrangement, on all responsive research grant proposals in astronomy and space science covering basic research, exploitation, theory and modelling and the development of basic ('blue skies') technology related to the programme.

Technology Development - Where Applicants are requesting support for a project involving technology development, it is essential to discuss with the office whether the project falls within STFC/AGP's remit. The office will liaise with the UKSA in advance of the AGP meetings where necessary. Additionally, where Applicants are considering requests for higher TRL level projects, advice **MUST** be sought from the office prior to submission. As general guidance:

The AGP will consider funding astronomy and space science proposals at Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1 – 4 or their equivalent. Modest upgrades to existing equipment, related to the delivery of science within the course of the project requested, may be considered. However, Applicants are advised to seek advice from the Office before submitting.

The [STFC PRD](#) scheme (currently in abeyance and under review) will consider non-space mission-related Proposals at TRL 4 – 6; UKSA will consider space mission-related Proposals at TRL 5 and above

The AGP will comprise experts to cover all science areas of the programme and provide an overview of the process and programme to ensure support is provided to research of the highest quality across the science programme. Sub-Panels of appropriate experts from the AGP will meet to assess elements of each proposal that fall within their remit and to provide input to the overall recommendation. The remit of each Sub-Panel is given in the details of the calls described below and should be referred to prior to submitting a proposal. The full AGP will review the output of the meetings and draw up final recommendations to be submitted to the Science Board (SB) and to UKSA SPAC.

Remit of AGP Calls - The AGP offers two calls for grant proposals. The remits of these two calls are set out below, if Applicants have any doubt about which call a particular project should be submitted to they are strongly encouraged to discuss this with the office at the earliest possible opportunity. The same deadline applies to proposals to the two calls. Projects judged by the Panel to be submitted to the wrong call will be **REJECTED**.

Astronomy Observation (AO) and Astronomy Theory (AT) Call

This call covers all aspects of astronomy and astrophysics beyond the solar system:

- Stellar physics, including star formation and extra-solar planetary systems (studies of the Sun as part of a programme of stellar physics may fit here);
- Studies of transient phenomena;
- The interstellar medium and galactic astronomy;
- Extra-galactic astronomy and cosmology;
- The astrophysical aspects of particle astrophysics, including dark matter, cosmic rays and gravity;
- Blue skies technology/instrumentation development applicable to the above areas;
- Laboratory astrophysics, including software development, relevant to the above programmes.

Solar Studies (SS) and Planetary Studies (PL) Call

This call covers theory, including modelling, simulation and related software development, observation, experiment and new technology research, relevant to all aspects of solar system science. This includes but is not restricted to:

- Solar physics and heliospheric physics;
- Space-based terrestrial magnetospheric science and fundamental space plasma physics (excluding the impact on the Earth's neutral atmosphere);
- Planetary science, including the surfaces and interiors, atmospheres, ionospheres and magnetospheres of the solar system bodies other than the Earth;

- Studies of other solar system bodies including comets, asteroids, meteorites, etc.;
- Laboratory studies of solar system material such as meteorites, returned samples, solar system analogues, other laboratory physics relevant to the area of the call and related software development;
- Blue skies technology/instrumentation development applicable to the above areas.

Note that studies related to the UKSA's programme of Aurora science (Mars exploration and sample return) should be addressed to UKSA in the first instance as separate funding may be available and this may preclude funding via AGP.

3 - Timetable

Date:	Action:
4th March	Submission of Consolidated or Consortium grant proposals
April/May	Review Process
June	Applicants to respond to reviewer comments and Panel questions
September	Peer Review Panel Meetings
October	Science Board and UK Space Agency endorsement
October / November	Outcome Announced

4 - General information

Applicants must first check the eligibility criteria which can be found in the [Research Grants Handbook](#) and then decide whether they wish to be part of an institutional-focused Consolidated grant proposal or a science-focused Consortium grant proposal, which includes Applicants from more than one institution. They should then follow the relevant guidance laid out below for the scheme they have chosen. Applicants applying for a New Applicant proposal should refer to section 8 for specific guidance.

Consolidated Grant Proposals

It is expected that a university department or similar organisational unit will submit a *single** Consolidated grant proposal covering its entire research programme to one or both AGP calls. This can be either to AO/AT or to SS/PL, or a separate proposal to each. (*STFC recognises that there may be exceptional cases so would consider such cases on an individual basis; these should be directed to the Office in the first instance).

Proposals should be divided strictly along science lines and should not contain a mix of projects from the two calls. Applicants with **SIGNIFICANT** science activities spanning the divide between the two calls may request resources on proposals submitted to both calls in the same round. However, it is expected that there will be relatively few such Applicants and that the vast majority of Applicants will propose projects to only a single call. It should be noted that AGP will carefully scrutinise such cases, so this flexibility is not to be used as an opportunity to substantially expand requests for resources - frivolous requests will have a negative overall impact on the proposal, and in extreme cases may lead to a project being rejected. Applicants who are requesting resources through both calls should be clearly identified in the two-page description of the programme and need to be explicitly justified.

Consortium Grant Proposals

Consortium grant proposals are essentially joint proposals with a common research programme from groups of Researchers in more than one organisation. The aim is to provide a concerted and coordinated effort to tackle a particular research area or technology development. The expectation therefore is that the subject of the Consortium

proposal will be the **main** research activity within the AGP area for those Applicants on the proposal. If considering submitting a Consortium proposal, Applicants are required to discuss this with the office well in advance of submission to agree whether a Consortium proposal would be appropriate. A brief written summary of the proposed Consortium is likely to be requested as part of this process.

As part of a Consortium proposal, different institutions submit a single case for support but with separate Je-S forms. Je-S functionality allows such proposals to be linked and this linkage is supported by the grants system. Applicants are therefore expected to use the linking functionality.

Applicants should note that although the AGP has divided its remit into two distinct calls based on science content, individuals CANNOT request funds or be named on both an AGP Consolidated proposal and a Consortium proposal simultaneously. Applicants therefore need to think very carefully about the choice they make.

Examples of the combinations of proposals that groups/individuals may consider are shown as acceptable, and not acceptable, in the following table:

Combination	Acceptable?	
	Yes	No
Group: A single Consolidated or Consortium proposal submitted to the AO/AT call	Yes	
Group: A single Consolidated or Consortium proposal submitted to the SS/PL call	Yes	
Group: A Consolidated proposal submitted to the SS/PL and a second Consolidated proposal submitted to the AO/AT call (must be submitted to the same closing date)	Yes	
Group: A Consortium proposal submitted to the SS/PL and a second Consortium proposal submitted to the AO/AT call (must be submitted to the same closing date)	Yes	
Group: A single Consolidated or Consortium proposal covering three or more of the four sub areas (i.e. AO, AT, SS, PL) submitted to either call		No
Individual: A Consortium proposal submitted to either the AO/AT or SS/PL call and a Consolidated proposal submitted to either the SS/PL or AO/AT call.		No

Prior to submitting a proposal, Applicants are strongly advised to pay particular attention to the following:

- Applicants who do not secure funding within a Consolidated or Consortium proposal are not permitted to apply for funding between submissions. (For example, Applicants named on proposals submitted to the 2021 grant round and who do not secure funding are not permitted to request further funding until 2024).
- Applicants who choose to move between Consolidated and Consortium proposals (or vice versa), or from one Consortium to a different Consortium are not permitted to apply for any resources (Applicant time, PDRA or otherwise) for the duration of the award they previously applied for. The only exception to this is a New Applicant

- proposal from staff who move Institutions.
- A bid for a Consolidated or Consortium grant will not necessarily result in an award.
- All Consolidated and Consortium grants will start on the 1st April of the year following submission

Grant Cycle

It is expected that most groups will apply for new Consolidated grants on a 3-year cycle. The following shows the pattern that should apply in the steady state:

Grant 1: submit to the 2021 closing date

Duration: Start 1.4.22 – 31.3.25 (3 years)

Next application: 2024 closing date

Outcome notified by October/November 2024 – 6 months before 1.4.25 when the new grant is due to start

Grant 2: submit to the 2024 closing date

Duration: Start 1.4.25 – 31.3.28 (3 years)

Next application: 2027 closing date

Outcome notified by October/November 2027 - 6 months before 1.4.28 when the new grant is due to start

Existing support

When a group or individual submits a Consolidated or Consortium grant proposal, any existing STFC AGP grants (with the exception of existing Consolidated grants, i.e. New Applicant awards) should be subsumed into the proposal. Such support is considered a funding commitment and needs only a brief nominal justification. Of course, many Applicants will then request funding for new projects closely related to the existing grant, in which case the nominal justification for the existing grant can be included in the full case for the new project.

Level of request

Applicants are advised that they should be realistic about the level of support requested. The AGP would **STRONGLY** suggest that only a small number of additional posts should be requested above existing support. All Applicants should consider the level of their request carefully and are free to contact the office for guidance if needed. **We stress that it is not in the Applicants' interest to apply for large numbers of posts that have very little hope of being supported. We will therefore expect Applicants to choose those projects to put forward within their Consolidated or Consortium proposals with care.**

Grant Extensions

Consolidated and Consortium grants will be awarded with a maximum duration of 3 years. However, flexibility can be achieved, where required, by STFC allowing a no-cost extension of up to 1 year, which should only be requested after the grant has been awarded.

It should be noted that Consolidated or Consortium grants are considered independently of each other, therefore if a Consolidated grant, for example, is awarded which overlaps with the existing grant (due to an extension) the existing grant remains active and its duration unchanged.

5. Proposal Process

Je-S Submission – [Je-S Guidance](#)

All proposals should be submitted via the Je-S system, selecting the following:

Doc Type: Standard Proposal

Scheme: Standard

Call: Either AO & AT 2021 **OR** SS & PL 2021

Please note the deadline for submission is Thursday 4th March at 4.00pm

Structure of Proposals

Proposals should be clearly divided into distinct projects, each of which should be presented as a self-contained case and include the following:

- A clearly identified Lead Applicant;
- The scientific background and motivation;
- Methodology and workplan, including timeline;
- Clearly defined roles for all PDRAs, Technicians and Applicants requesting funding;
- Appropriate references.

Any links to material outside of the proposal may be disregarded. Applicants are welcome to group their projects into scientific “themes” or similar, point out cross-links, stress synergies, and so on, if they feel this makes their case stronger. However, although projects are reviewed within the context of a whole grant proposal, they are assessed and ranked independently.

Individual projects are assessed and ranked in their entirety. The AGP does not dissect projects and rank smaller work-packages individually.

Each project should contain Applicant time, up to a maximum of one FTE of PDRA effort (per year), plus any technician time or studentships as appropriate. The panel recognises that technical or lab-based projects may require fractions of the time of specialist PDRAs, but this should not exceed the overall envelope of one FTE of PDRA effort per project. There may also occasionally be projects which involve only Investigator time. It is recognised that some Applicants may wish to divide the time of some staff members between projects, which will be assessed and ranked separately.

In order to be easily partitioned for review, each project should start on a new page and provide the following summary information as a heading to the project:

- Project Title
- Which of the broad Sub-Panel areas it relates to - Astronomy Observation, Astronomy Theory, Solar Studies, Planetary Studies. Note however that the AGP may revise the allocation within sub panels (e.g. move an AO proposal to AT, or SS to PL)
- Summary of FTE requested
- An indication of the relevance of the project to Space-based or Ground-based activities, or both
- An indication of the activity:
 1. Data exploitation & experiment
 2. Development of new instrumentation, facilities or techniques
 3. Theory & simulation

For example:

Title: A new window on the universe (Astronomy Theory)

Applicant 1 (name) 15%, Applicant 2 (name) 5%, PDRA (name) 100% - Total FTE 1.20

30% Ground based - 70% space based: Exploitation & Experiment 50% - Theory – 50%

It is essential that the peer review process is efficient and effective. An important element is

to ensure that the Applicants and the Reviewers are not overloaded with paperwork, and that proposals are focused on addressing the key issues. Applicants should therefore be mindful of both clarity and brevity when preparing a proposal and present it in such a way that it is easy for the peer review Panel to follow. Remember that not all members of the Panel will be equally familiar with the research topic or the methods involved. Applicants must ensure that in the proposal:

- Every element of the request is fully justified (including guideline requests) within the case for support;
- It is made clear where a proposal spans the pairs of AGP Sub-Panels within a call and the percentage of research relevant to each Panel, e.g. 50% of a proposal may be appropriate for consideration by Astronomy Observation and the remaining 50% by Astronomy Theory;
- Responses to the [assessment criteria](#) are clear or if not relevant, stated as such;
- All the requirements are strictly adhered to.

Applicants are advised to consult the office prior to submission if queries cannot be answered by reference to this guidance note.

Page Limits

Page limit – case for support (the file size has a maximum limit of 10 megabytes imposed by Je-S and cannot be submitted if larger than this)

- All pages (including references) must be in an appropriate font; please refer to the [Je-S Guidance](#) for more information. Our preferred font size is Arial Standard Pt 11. *(Please note that in previous years we have accepted Times New Roman but this is no longer permitted. Any proposals using Times New Roman or “Narrow” fonts will be rejected.)*
- A maximum of 2 pages are permitted to describe the programme in the group, or department, setting. As of 2021, there is no longer a requirement for a separate ‘Pathways to Impact’ document, so the expected impact of the research programme should be addressed in these two pages. The applicants should look to highlight the the potential application of technology in other fields, third party professional sector engagement and outreach opportunities (e.g. business, government, NGO engagement), The development of transferable skills supported by STFC, inspiring young people to value STEM skills and consider STEM careers, engaging wider society and specific interested/affected demographics with the themes, progress and outcomes of your research or creating opportunities for two-way interactions between the research community and society. Please note outreach projects requesting support should be presented separately, see below. In addition, Applicants requesting resources on proposals submitted to both the AO/AT and SS/PL calls should be identified in this section in both proposals and their presence on both grants explicitly justified.
- A maximum of 2 pages to describe and justify resources cutting across ALL projects i.e. travel, equipment, system manager support, secretarial support, visiting researcher funding, HPC and data storage requests etc. (NOT to be used for project-specific resources). **(This section does not apply to proposals requesting a single project).**

Further pages are permitted as follows:

Projects requesting Applicant plus PDRA time (plus any technical support and/or student) are allowed a maximum of 4 pages to describe the scientific case, including work plan / timeline, justification of resources, and references.

Larger technical projects that request Applicant time plus >0.5 FTE of technical support, but no PDRA, are also allowed a maximum of 4 pages to describe the scientific case, including work plan / timeline, justification of resources, and references.

Projects requesting Applicant time only, Applicant time plus Student, or Applicant time plus a small amount of technical support (≤ 0.5 FTE) are allowed a maximum of 2 pages to describe the scientific case, including work plan / timeline, justification of resources and references.

In addition, Applicants holding fellowships and who are making a contribution to the project but not requesting salaries must be included and justified in the page limit.

One page maximum is allowed for ALL outreach project requests, to describe the case, workplan/timeline, justification of resources and references (please refer to section 6 'requesting resources' for more information).

Applicants should note that the page limits are to be used as described above and are NOT transferable between sections and/or projects. Proposals that exceed the page limits will be returned for amendment if time permits, but run the risk of being REJECTED.

The need for all personnel on a project, along with their role, must be fully justified in the case. The Panel will not support posts that are inadequately justified, and reserve the right to reject any project where the requested FTE has been inflated.

Required Information / Attachments (Each attachment has a maximum file size of 5 megabytes)

This information MUST be provided as part of the proposal and is in addition to the main case for support. Applicants should **classify attachments** correctly using the options available in Je-S and submit as a PDF. Failure to do so could result in an incomplete proposal being sent to Reviewers (for example documents classified as "other" are NOT sent out for review). Guidance as to the correct *Je-S Classification* is included below.

- A summary of all current support from STFC, with the Panel clearly identified (e.g. PGP) and a summary of all other support from any other funding agency (e.g. grants, ERC programmes, etc.) held by the Applicants/PDRAs on the proposal and which are relevant to the proposed programme of work. Each item of support should show: title, value, the number and type of staff posts funded, start and end dates and a complete abstract. **It is the Applicants' responsibility to demonstrate to the peer review Panel that the programme to be carried out on the requested proposal is clearly distinct from existing support.** It should also be made clear where Applicants intend to subsume existing New Applicant grants into the Consolidated/Consortium grant request (*Je-S Classification*: to be included as part of the Case for Support).
- A requested summary table, which should provide details of the requested resources for each project within a science area (Sub Panel). Please refer to the guidance provided on the format of the table required. (*Je-S Classification*: to be included as part of the Case for Support).
- Facilities Table – This has been revised so please refer to the Facilities Table template and guidance (*Je-S Classification*: to be included as part of the Case for Support).

- A SUMMARY publication statistics table for all Applicants. Please refer to publication table guidance. (*Attachment, Je-S Classification: List of Publications*)
- A Gantt chart showing current support and requested support. Please refer to the guidance provided. (*Attachment, Je-S Classification: Gantt Chart*) Not applicable to New Applicant proposals
- Data management plan (Maximum of 2 pages) – please refer to the [Data Management Plan Guidance](#) and Je-S guidance. (*Attachment, Je-S Classification: Data Management Plan*)
- Equipment quotes are **NOT** needed for single items of equipment under £138k (£115k excluding VAT). For single items over the £138k threshold, please refer to [Equipment Guidance](#) and Je-S guidance for more information.
- CV's are **NOT** required for proposals submitted to the AGP.
- As of March 2020, a separate Pathways to Impact Statement is no longer required for proposals
- Applicants should note that failure to provide the required information is likely to have a negative impact on the overall proposal

Additional information may be included as part of the Proposal, if considered **essential** for the Panel's assessment, for example;

- Letters of support (a maximum of three letters, *Je-S Classification: Letters of Support*). Please refer to the [letters of support guidance](#) in the Research Grants Handbook for details on what the Panel would consider to be helpful in a letter of support
- Links to relevant websites detailing the scientific case for approved projects e.g. ELT

Any additional clarifying information may be requested at the discretion of the AGP or the Council.

Gantt Chart

Gantt charts are essential to the Panel when considering past and present staff support and must be completed in the same format as the example provided. Applicants are only required to provide information on STFC funded posts. Consolidated and Consortium grants are designed to provide flexibility and staff may be moved to projects other than those originally recommended for support by the Panel. However, the AGP will need to establish which staff member is working on which project and how (if at all) that differed from the recommended award. If completed correctly, the Gantt chart provides this information.

The Panel will need to know of any existing grants that are being subsumed into the Consolidated or Consortium grants.

The office hold completed Gantt charts of previous Consolidated /Consortium awards, Applicants should therefore contact the office for a copy prior to submission. The original details as provided by the office should not be amended (although any changes as detailed above should be noted) and the requested posts section should be completed.

Download a worked [example](#)

To ensure uniformity across groups, Applicants **must** complete the Gantt chart as shown in the example, following the guidance provided. Ambiguous or erroneous Gantt charts may result in the proposal being rejected. If in any doubt about how to complete the Gantt chart, Applicants are advised to contact the office.

Requested Summary Table

To allow the Panel to easily identify the resources and staff effort requested per project a requested summary table must be completed. Any cross-cutting items should clearly indicate which projects they are tied to, and how the cost is to be split between the different projects. It is **essential** that the project identifiers (numbers/titles/etc.) used in the table match those used to identify the projects within the case for support and are shown in numerical / alphabetical order. To ensure uniformity across proposals, Applicants **must** complete a requested summary table in the same format (including coloured text) as the example provided

Download a worked [example](#)

Publication Table

Each proposal should provide a statistical summary of the research productivity for each individual Applicant. It is recognised that productivity may be expressed in a number of forms. *As a minimum* each Applicant should list the number of refereed publications over a 5-year period, or shorter specified period if appropriate and, where appropriate, the number of these on which they are first or corresponding author. Applicants should also indicate the number of first-author outputs produced by students under their direct supervision or line management. The student-led papers in this column should be unique, in that each student-led paper can be attributed to only one applicant. These data should be derived from 'ADS', or 'Web of Science'. Please use names for Applicants that will, as far as possible, allow them to be uniquely identified in bibliographic searches.

The publication table will be used as a *starting point* in establishing Applicant track record and will not be used to make fine distinctions in determining priorities for funding.

The AGP recognises the unequal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the productivity of different groups. Thus, the 5-year period used for the publication table should be the period January 2015 - December 2019. Any career breaks in this period can be noted in a footnote.

Furthermore, in line with updated STFC assessment criteria PDRA publication statistics will not be used in the assessment process. These are therefore not required and should not be listed in the publication table.

Example form: Period covered January 2015 – Dec 2019

Applicant	Number of refereed papers	Number of 1 st -author refereed papers	Number of technical reports	Number of 1 st -author technical reports	Number of 1 st -author student papers
A.N. Other ¹					
A.N. Other ²					

1. Note: A.N. Other² was on maternity leave for 6 months from June-Dec 2016.

2. Technical papers are defined here as those specifically arising from instrument development or construction and not un-refereed science papers.

In the final row of the summary table, groups should include the total number of unique papers over January 2015-December 2019 (this is not the same as summing output from individual investigators), and the total number of unique papers originating from within the group.

In addition, if they wish, Applicants can provide alternative measures to demonstrate their research productivity. Any authorship conventions or policies in fields or collaborations should also be noted. Those engaged in hardware and software projects and other technical activities, can also demonstrate past productivity, where appropriate, by listing technical reports published, or by showing evidence of innovation and technical development, external contracts and other enabling activities.

If there is any ambiguity on how to present publications in a particular case, Applicants should contact the office. Note that the intention is to provide the AGP with unambiguous information on the track record and productivity of the Applicants.

6. Requesting Resources

The AGP considers proposals which are wide ranging in the level of resources requested, and would expect to see specific, explicit and compelling justification for all requests, even where the guideline levels of travel, computing consumables etc. have been requested. AGP will consider different levels of request but lack of compelling justification will have a negative impact on the proposal, and in extreme cases may lead to a project being rejected.

Applicant Time:

Applicants should note that the Je-S system averages Applicant time over the duration of the Proposal. The actual request, which may vary over the years, should be made clear on the requested summary table.

Per project:

- Every project must have a single, identified **Lead Applicant**, who must request at least 15% FTE for scientific contribution, oversight of the project and management of any personnel involved in the project. This 'Lead Applicant' FTE may NOT be split across Applicants. Only one such leading/major involvement is permitted per Applicant;
- Additional Applicants may request FTE on projects where they have a clear and significant role but are not leading the project;
- An Applicant is NOT permitted to request more than 25% FTE summed across all projects submitted to the AGP on one or more Consolidated or Consortium grants (not including the guideline management time permitted);
- Projects that do not follow this guidance will be REJECTED.

All Applicant FTE requests must be clearly and explicitly justified in the proposal.

Management time:

PI management time 1% per research FTE (Researchers, Applicants) capped at 10%.
(This does not apply to proposals requesting a single project)

Applicant time but with zero salary costs

Applicants who are not requesting a salary contribution may request guideline support costs

(travel, computing consumables etc.) based on their level of contribution to the project (FTE). However, in such instances the case for support **MUST** make it clear whether Estate and Indirect costs have been included in the request. Please ensure you apply for these posts correctly via the JeS system; applicants requesting zero salary and zero overheads should be entered as zero FTE and zero cost. Applicants requesting zero salary and overheads (Estates/Indirects) should enter their FTE in the system and zero cost

Un-named Research Staff and Named Research Staff – please refer to the Grants handbook [Research Staff](#).

Travel

- Researchers or students: Conferences, workshops and meetings etc. - £2k per FTE per annum. £2.4k per FTE per annum – Northern Ireland, Scotland and other less accessible places at the discretion of the Office.
- Applicants: Conferences, workshops and meetings etc. - £4k per FTE per annum.
- £4.8k per FTE per annum – Northern Ireland, Scotland and other less accessible places at the discretion of the Office.
- Visitor Travel - £1k per FTE (Applicants, Researchers) per annum.

Other Directly Incurred (ODI)

- Computing and general consumables that are project specific e.g. Laptops, desktops (not provided by the RO as standard from within Indirect costs, in accordance with UKRI practice*), contributions to local network resources, data management costs, book/monograph publication etc - £2k per FTE per annum.

* The Research Organisation is expected to provide laptops for staff on continuing contracts; we define a continuing contract position as being where a person is already employed by the RO and is then moved to work on the grant and therefore are not employed only for the purpose of working on the project. Laptops may only be costed where a new member of staff who is employed purely for the grant will require this, if a person is employed by the Research Organisation (RO) to work on multiple projects then the RO cannot charge a laptop to the grant for that person, unless a higher specification of laptop is required for the completion of specific grant related activities such as data modelling, enhanced graphics etc..Recruitment costs - £1k per un-named PDRA.

Note: Publication costs associated with journal articles and conference papers may not be requested on grant proposals

- **Equipment (Capital – single items in excess of £10k, inclusive of VAT)**
Applicants may request the purchase of equipment outright, or in part, sharing across a number of projects where appropriate or contracting out a specific task.

In general, STFC expects to contribute around 50% of the cost of such equipment items, although this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, subject to STFC's prior approval, Equipment costs associated with the construction of unique items of Equipment (e.g. instrument development, may be funded in full (i.e. at 100%). For further information please refer to the Research Grants Handbook and Je-S helptext.

- **Support Staff – Directly Incurred**
Secretarial support 8% per FTE (Applicants, Researchers).
Computer Officer 10% per FTE (Applicants, Researchers).

- **Support Staff - Other Directly Allocated**

Pooled staff costs and pooled technical posts should be clearly identified as %FTE on the requested summary table. Secretarial and Computer Officer support requested under this fund heading should follow the same guidelines as above.

It is recognised that Research Organisations may apply a rate per full time effort or post for certain items. Whilst this is fully acceptable it must be clear from the case what is included within the rate.

Applicants should note that with the exception of DI staff posts (which will be profiled and paid as per the start and end dates of the posts) and Equipment (which will be profiled and paid over the first year), all funds awarded (including Estate costs, Indirect costs and Infrastructure Technicians) will be evenly profiled and subsequently paid over the full 3-year duration.

Requesting Studentships

For guidance please see the Studentships on grants section of the Research Grants Handbook [Project Students](#)

Applicants should not confuse requests for project students with the specific studentship schemes available from STFC. However, the AGP will need to be informed of the number of STFC-funded studentships held within the group, and **would expect to see strong and compelling justification why these other sources could not be utilised for the proposed project**. Applicants need to be mindful that, as with all elements of a proposal, full justification for a studentship is required. Applicants should note that supervision of PhD students is covered by the PhD student fees, and this may not be used as justification for applicant time.

Outreach Projects

Proposals may include requests for funds to support outreach project, which describe specific outreach that result from the proposed research projects described in the case. The project must be directly tied to one or more projects in the proposal and showcase unique aspects from those projects. Applicants should avoid describing their group's outreach activities in general and outreach projects are not intended to help resource the groups wider outreach programme.

One page maximum is permitted for ALL outreach project requests, to describe the case, workplan/timeline, justification of resources and references. The lead applicant for an outreach proposal is not required to request 15% FTE to lead the project, and may also lead a research project (through the applicant's FTE must remain within the 25% FTE limit).

Please note, outreach projects will be assessed separately to their related projects, but are contingent on the related projects being funded.

7. Peer review process

The AGP comprises four Sub-Panels of experts covering the following four broad science areas within Astronomy:

AGP: AO - Astronomy Observations

AGP: AT – Astronomy Theory

AGP: SS – Solar Studies & Space-based Solar Terrestrial Physics

AGP: PL – Planetary Studies

In addition, a Technical Expertise Sub-Panel provides expertise on the AGP to appropriately tension technical and exploitation/theory projects. Details of Panel membership can be found at [AGP Panel Members](#)

The Sub-Panels and the AGP as a whole do not have delegated financial authority but, wherever possible, will be given information on the availability of funds. All the AGP members will have access to all information pertaining to the round i.e. Proposals, Reviewer reports, Applicants response etc. subject to conflicts of interest.

Reviewer Comments

On receipt of the proposals the Sub-Panel chairs will identify at least one Introducer (a Panel member) for each proposal. Proposals relevant to more than one broad Science area will have multiple Introducers as appropriate.

For each Proposal allocated, the Introducer/s will identify appropriate Reviewers. Reviewers are asked to provide comments within three weeks.

All Reviewer comments received are sent to the Applicants along with guidance on page length for responses (see below) and response due dates. Additionally, Applicants are given the opportunity to address specific Panel questions.

Guidance for completing Applicant Responses

Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to Reviewer comments and Panel questions. The following provides guidance on page limits and what is expected by the AGP

Applicant response to Reviewer comments and panel questions

Applicants will be given the opportunity to see and respond to Reviewer comments via Je-S. The page limit for a response is a maximum of 0.5 pages to address cross-cutting comments (not transferable and not applicable to single project proposals and New Applicant proposals), then 0.5 pages per project (transferable between projects). Responses must therefore be brief in addressing the key issues raised by the reviewers.

Applicants will also be given the opportunity to respond to Panel questions and update the Panel with any relevant information. The page limit for a response is a maximum of 0.5 pages per question. In writing a response Applicants should be mindful to simply address the question asked; this is not an opportunity to re-write the case. The Panel questions will be sent to the Applicants via email but should be uploaded to the JeS system as part of the PI Response document/process.

The responses should be returned via Je-S within 10 working days of receipt. If an Applicant exceeds the page limits the response will be rejected.

AGP Peer Review Meetings

Two meetings are held, for AO/AT Sub-Panels jointly and for SS/PL Sub-Panels jointly. Panel members are asked to leave the room when a proposal from their own Institution, or a proposal or project on which they are otherwise conflicted, is being discussed. Any conflicts of interest are identified prior to discussing a proposal and recorded by the office. Each proposal is considered in turn with the Introducer leading the discussion by providing

an overview of the proposed science, taking account of Reviewer comments, Panel questions and Applicants' responses to both.

STFC is committed to the UKRI [Principles of Peer Review](#) throughout our assessment and decision-making processes. In its assessment of proposals the Panel will look at each category referred to in the Research Grants Handbook [Assessment Criteria](#).

The Panel assessment will use the criteria and weightings described in the [AGP Chair's Community Report from 2020](#), apart from "Productivity of any named PDRA" which is no longer considered under the revised STFC criteria.

Each Sub-Panel meeting will agree a final assessment; recommend appropriate level of resources and a ranking position for each project contained within the grant proposal, separately. After all proposals have been considered, the Panel will revisit the ranked list to ensure it is satisfied with the outcome. The agreed ranked list will go forward to the merging process. Throughout the Sub-Panel meetings the Chairs will note science areas, facilities, number of PDRA's, number of Students, Applicant time etc. which will form part of the AGP report required by the STFC Science Board and UKSA.

AGP Merging Process

After the Sub-Panel meetings, a sub-set of AGP will review all recommendations and agree a final combined ranked list for all projects, across the two calls and the four Sub-Panel areas. This process will be run by the AGP Chair, and involve also the Deputy, the Sub-Panel chairs, and a number of the Sub-Panel members.

Plenary meeting

All Panel members will be asked to attend the plenary meeting which will be chaired by the AGP Chair. The Panel will review the outcome of the round.

Post-meetings

The AGP Chair will report to STFC Science Board and to the UKSA on the recommended outcome for the round. The final funding line will be determined by the STFC budget holder at which point Applicants will be informed of the outcome with appropriate feedback.

8. New Applicants Scheme

Newly appointed Academic members of staff who have joined a department between Consolidated or Consortium submissions may exceptionally apply separately for support. Please refer to the [Research Grants Handbook - Types of STFC research funding](#) for the rules on eligibility.

Terms of the Scheme

- Applicants may not be funded on more than one grant. For example, if an individual transfers from another university where they have held STFC-supported resources, they would be expected to seek to negotiate the relocation of those resources. Irrespective of this, they cannot hold resource on both a New Applicant grant and either a Consolidated grant at their previous institution or on a Consortium grant.
- Applicants must be the sole investigator.
- Applicants can only apply once at any institution for a New Applicant award.
- The relevant department's Consolidated or Consortium grant submission date should be a minimum of 1 year away from the submission date of the new Applicant's grant.

- Where a department holds an existing Consolidated or Consortium grant, Applicants will need to demonstrate that there are insufficient funds within the flexibility of the existing grant to support their research.
- Applicants can apply for funding for a minimum of a year and a maximum of 3 years (or until the issue of the department's Consolidated or Consortium grant).
- Applicants can apply for limited resources to allow them to begin to establish a research programme.
- The relevant grant Panel will assess proposals against the same criteria as the Consolidated/Consortium grant Proposals (and funding will come from the appropriate grants line).

Submission of Proposals

Applicants should submit a 1-page pre-Proposal (by email to Kim.Burchell@stfc.ukri.org and chloe.woodcock@stfc.ukri.org) for consideration in consultation with the AGP Chairs. The pre-proposal should include the following

- An explanation of the circumstances, why a New Applicant proposal is appropriate, and how the proposal matches the eligibility criteria set out above.
- A description of all current support (starter package etc.).
- A brief description of the nature and strength of the scientific case that would be described in full if permission for a full Proposal is given.
- An indication of the requested resources and duration.
- The pre-proposal should be accompanied by a brief letter from the Head of Department confirming the employment status and timing. In addition, where a department holds an existing Consolidated or Consortium grant an explanation must be given of why the new member of staff's research cannot be supported using the spending flexibility allowed within the existing grant.

If the case for funding is considered to be potentially a high priority, Applicants will be advised to submit a full Proposal for consideration by the AGP at the next announced closing date.

A New Applicant full proposal should follow the guidance provided for Consolidated/Consortium grants, but noting the following differences:

- A maximum of 1 page is permitted to describe the programme in the group, or department, setting. (Page limit is not transferable to other sections.)
- All resources should be justified in the Project case for support with no separate section for cross-cutting resources
- A Gantt chart is NOT required

The process for responding to reviewer comments and Panel Q&A is outlined on page 14

9. Additional useful links and contact information

Contacts:

Senior Programme Manager - Chloe.Woodcock@stfc.ukri.org

Head of Astronomy Awards – Kim.Burchell@stfc.ukri.org

Useful Links

[Peer review and assessment](#)

[Equality and Diversity](#)

[Research Fish](#)

[PRD definition](#)